

Veterans

President Bush is deeply committed to honoring our Nation's veterans by providing them with the health care, retirement security, and benefits they deserve. Because of the President's leadership, the Department of Veterans Affairs is more responsive to veterans' needs and has improved health care and claims processing times. President Bush's FY 2006 Budget reflects these goals.

Providing Medical Care to Veterans:

- The President's 2006 Veterans Affairs (VA) medical-care budget is more than 47 percent greater than when he took office, and VA will treat about 950,000 more patients in 2006 than it did in 2001. The Budget assumes that most new veterans enrolling in the VA medical-care system will fall under VA's core medical care mission – those with military disabilities, low incomes, and special needs – and that all other eligible veterans will pay a small annual enrollment fee and increased prescription drug co-payments that are still low but more in line with other public and private health-care programs.
- VA is working closely with the Department of Defense (DoD) to ensure that veterans returning from combat can immediately access VA medical care and quickly receive other VA benefits.
- Many of our Nation's veterans have moved to the South and Southwest, yet VA maintains underused hospitals throughout the northern and eastern regions of the country where fewer veterans live. VA completed a nationwide study of its facilities in 2004 to better align resources with patient needs by increasing services where veterans live and converting large underused hospitals into more efficient clinics. The 2006 Budget includes an additional \$750 million for this purpose.
- VA has been a leader in implementing health information technology to improve patient care. Electronic medical records, a bar-code drug dispensing system, and improved capability in electronically sharing medical information with DoD provide VA patients with better, more timely care. The Budget includes over \$300 million for VA's next generation health processing system. With this system, VA will be able to more easily share patient data with the veteran and other health care providers, such as DoD.

Replacing Lost Income for Disabled Veterans:

- In 2006, 2.7 million veterans will receive \$26 billion in tax-free benefits from VA, 57 percent more than when the President first came into office.

Providing Education Opportunities to Veterans:

- The 2006 Budget provides almost \$3 billion in educational benefits for veterans, active duty members, and reservists.

Promoting Homeownership Among Veterans:

- In 2006, VA expects to issue 300,000 guaranteed loans for nearly \$46.2 billion, including 183,000 no-downpayment loans. The program also offers options with 5-percent and 10-percent downpayments.

Helping Homeless Veterans:

- The Budget provides \$231 million to directly support VA's homeless network and an additional \$1.5 billion for medical care to homeless veterans.

National Cemeteries:

- The 2006 Budget provides over 35-percent more funding for burial services and national cemeteries than five years ago. The 2006 Budget provides funding to acquire land to build six new cemeteries, including one each in Alabama, Pennsylvania, California, and South Carolina, and two in Florida.